

Just Another Days Work

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Konoko investigates a seemingly abandoned warehouse when she receives a report of syndicate activity in the area. A simple search turns into a battle of survival!

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[Introduction](#)

[Just Another Days Work](#)

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It was another horrible night down the Sentomento district, the area that nobody in the TCTF looked forward to getting on their patrol router however Konoko was eager to prove herself after Muro's close escape at the airport plus it would help to take her mind off the whole business. Maybe something would turn up if she made a few enquirers.

"Yep another rainy night down the slums... still better make the best of it." Konoko mumbled to herself. It was raining heavily tonight and the usual aroma of garbage and human misery assaulted her nostrils. Yes this would certainly take her mind off things all right. This area of the city was filled with low cost housing or slums if you wanted to be frank instead of politically correct. The Rain dripped down her standard issue gray rain coat which as a added side effect helped her to blend in with the surrounding population. Her normal armoured attire would have made her stand out like a sore thumb in this crowd of low lifes and party goers and made any kind of information gathering useless. Nothing out of the ordinary as she looked around. A few guys seemingly drunk were causing trouble for a group of lady's dressed up for a night out. Better deal with them before things escalate. Just the sight of a agent should quieten things down.

Just then her radio crackled to life and the TCTF operator started to update her and anyone else listening on the overall situation. Thankfully Konoko had her ear piece on so no one even batted a eye lid.

"District 12 reporting minor robbery in progress. Agents Meadows and Robinson respond along route 18. District 13 reporting all clear. District 14, a few strikers spotted briefly on a factory security camera. Stay alert troopers. Swat have been put on standby"

Konoko was in district 13. Why bother patrolling this dump when she could aid the hunt for these strikers. Usually the syndicate only dispatched strikers when something big was going down. And something must be going down and Konoko wanted in on it after the airport debacle. She sure wasn't doing any good around here and truth be told any excuse to leave her current assignment would be a welcome one so she started walking towards the neighboring district. When Konoko was at the limits of her assigned sector she had another incoming radio call. Instead of the business like operators voice she heard Shinatama's sweet tone. Shinatama was Konoko's SLD handler but also her only real friend since she hadn't had what most would call a normal childhood.

"Konoko you're deviating from your assigned sector. Please turn back, commander Griffin was very clear for you not to leave that area. You know how he can be."

The last thing Konoko wanted was to cause trouble for Shinatama but if she made a impressive catch Griffin would have to rethink his reluctance to put her in the thick of things. "Don't worry Shinatama. I'm just going to investigate a little. See how the ground is over there before the troops do their sweep."

Shinatama's was told to keep a close watch over Konoko's actions and keep her away from stressful situations whenever possible. These orders came from commander Griffin himself. This action was a clear breach of these guidelines however she couldn't bear to turn in her only friend.

"Konoko... are you sure everything's alright. Your vital signs are showing elevated blood pressure. I was told... to look after you so I..."

"No need to worry. I'll be in and out before anyone notices. Just a little look around, no heroics if I can help it. Okay?"

"... Okay Konoko but please be careful. I'll provide as much assistance as possible here."

Konoko knew she could count on her! She didn't want to sit on the sidelines forever and was tried of being treated with kid gloves by some of the higher ups. She just wanted to go through the same hardships and experiences as the rest of her colleagues. She pushed her way through the crowd earning her the occasional colorful insult but she didn't really care anymore. Bigger fish to fry and all that! It was still raining pretty heavily and every step she took threw up a torrent of rainwater. The crowds were thinning out now as she approached the edge of the entertainment district just on the border of District 14.

District 14 was mostly full of old factory's and warehouses if she remembered correctly. A lot of it was shut down, abandoned or derelict. She was surrounded by large dark buildings looming up from street level as far as the eye could see disappearing into the night sky. Konoko spoke with a low pitch. Last thing she wanted was for her voice to echo around the place.

"Shinatama, I've reached the (She takes a look around for bearings) old Tarei car factory. Whereabouts was this sighting exactly?"

"The strikers were sighted off Prideful road offloading something from a truck into one of the warehouses. Number 54 if the sign is to be believed."

"Have they run a check on the warehouse number?"

Shinatama briefly checked her information screen. "Yes, apparently its rented out to a Mr Reynolds though the name is in all probability a fake. We'll continue to run checks but I wouldn't count on anything in all honesty."

She was right. If the warehouse was a front, and it was looking that way, then background checks would be a total waste of time. Konoko moved at a brisk pace down the pathway leading up to the warehouse past several old steel mills holding her hood up with one hand thanks to a strong winds blowing down the tightly packed buildings. Dam winds she thought to herself. Not only was it a pain in

the ass but it would make hearing anyone coming all the more so difficult though she supposed it would be the same story for any syndicate goons hanging around.

"Konoko, you're approaching close to the point where the strikers were spotted."

"Right" Konoko slowed down and pulled her binoculars out holding her left arm out above her face to shield her vision from the rain. She peered out around the corner crouching low. At first glance there didn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. Lights were out, no truck in the drive or any activity whatsoever. Of course this didn't mean that nothing was going on and Konoko wanted a closer look.

Visibility was still somewhat poor so she didn't think there was much chance of someone spotting her so she broke cover and ran low towards the outlying wall, reaching it within a few seconds. She ducked along the wall which was low enough to cover her from view if anyone took a curious look outside and upon reaching the end she took out a portable mirror and drew her enforcer handgun. The mirror was meant to allow her to scan the area without having to stick her hand out. Agents could be spotted or worse if they were careless reconning an area. That's what her instructor had always drilled into her.

Konoko took in her surroundings. The warehouse loomed up in front of her clearly visible in the poring rain like some malevolent colossus. The truck that had supposedly been picked up by security cameras had vanished, no tracks were left thanks to the appalling weather. "Right, coast looks clear to me Shinatama. I'm moving to check out the interior. Give me an ETA on backup?"

"Agents will be with you in approximately 8 minutes assuming traffic conditions remain favorable....be careful Konoko"

Konoko stalked towards the door, side arm held low at the ready. A smile appeared on her face. "Thanks Shinatama but nothing's going to happen to me. Those guys have no idea who they're dealing with".

Shinatama also smiled to herself. Konoko was always so confident in everything she put her mind to.

Konoko made her way along the warehouses side watching out for any sentry's on lookout while also looking for a point of entry other than the main cargo shutter which would surely be guarded if the warehouse was occupied. There! A walkway that leaded up to the second floor. Kokono made her way up the stairs slowly to help muffle her footsteps (Not to mention everything was slippy thanks to the rain) and upon reaching the top she peered through the window only for a spilt second then ducked below. Nothing but darkness. She placed her hand on the door nob and slowly turned it clockwise. The door wasn't locked. Either whoever was in here was very sloppy or they had moved on. Thats assuming everything was going on here in the first place.

The interior was dark and gloomy and stank of used chemicals. Generally its cheaper to discard potentially dangerous substances instead of disposing of them in the proper and lawful manner regardless of whoever may stumble upon them. Wouldn't want to let your children play in a place like this with rusty oil drums and god knows what else lying around.

Konoko was forced to holster her firearm while she may her way down the corridor in order to simply avoid bumping into the multitude of soggy boxes, lead piping and... whatever the rest of this stuff was.

So after a few minutes running the gauntlet she finally approached a light source. Konoko crouched down to give herself some time for her eyes to adjust. She could just make out some sounds ahead though they were still to faint to discern what they actually were. One thing was now clear to her now. And that was that she was not alone here. Better update Shinatama.

"Hello Shinatama? Can you still read me?" She said softy into her microphone. She could hear quite a lot of background noise when she opened up the frequency to headquarters.

Shinatama sounded almost frantic "No, move down the west highway as theres heavy traffic down the wegaen strip. Meet up with Lucas and help pursue the strikers by cutting them off when they reach the next intersection."

"Shinatama? Things sound pretty hectic down there."

"Oh Konoko? I'm sorry, I've been trying to coordinate a dozen operations at once. We've only got a few operators on staff at the moment so I've been drafted in to help out." Headquarters was always understaffed during the night shift which didn't help matters if they had a big spike in activity.

Konoko hoped they hadn't been pushing her too hard, people had a tendency to forget about the wellbeing of SLD's. "Well I'll just quickly update you on the situation. I've infiltrated the warehouse and can hear some machinery somewhere in the interior. I will proceed to investigate further. No contact with any syndicates yet."

While listening to Konoko's report Shinatama was unsuccessfully juggling 3 ongoing communications with field teams across the city. This task would probably be beyond any normal human operator "Right Konoko....I'm sorry but I was forced to reroute the officers that were on their way to support you to help with..."

Not wanting to waste anymore of her time Konoko decided to cut her off and let her get on with her job. "That... thats fine Shinatama. I'll proceed with my investigation alone for now. Signing off for now, good luck back at base"

"... you too Konoko. Don't over do things. Signing off." Shinatama immediately returned to her job coordinating officers across the city.

Right then. Looks like I'm going to be on my own for the foreseeable future. Better get moving. Konoko started moving silently towards the end of the corridor. As she approached the end of the corridor she began to hear something. The rhythmic tap tap on the hard concrete floor that could only be the heavy footsteps of someone human

sized, approximately 210 pounds if her senses were with her today. That could indicate someone with the type of heavy body armor that the enemy's of the TCTF employed. The syndicate did employ attack dogs to help guard some of their more sensitive sites but thankfully she detected none of the tell tell signs. Judging by the amount of noise this person was making as he/she walked down the corridor, this individual wasn't concerned with muffling their footsteps. This could mean it was a civilian or a particularly lax guard.

Konoko paused just before she came to the junction between the corridor she was in and the passageway up ahead. She crouched down behind a wooden box confident that the low visibility would shield her from view. The footsteps grew ever louder until a figure appeared. It was hard to pierce the gloom but she could make out the distinctive image of a striker, the syndicates basic footsoldier. Clad in a green bodysuit with armor around the chest, legs and forearms and gauntleted hands the strikers were imposing figures. It was usual for them to wear a helmet which came in many variants. Some covered the entire face like a mask while others were more open with only optical devices over the eyes. Green also told her that she was facing a lower class member with blue indicating a mid level thug while red was reserved for squad leaders and veterans. What should she do? What should she do? She was more than capable of dispatching someone quickly and silently.

Her mind made up she waited until the striker had passed her position down the corridor and as soon as he disappeared from view she left cover and moved to the edge of the wall careful not to make any sound. She then reached down for a piece of rubble lying on the ground and threw it behind the striker. Hopefully the striker wouldn't feel this was important enough to call in and would come back to investigate. Sure enough he turned his head around trying to identify the source of the noise and making nothing out in the gloom pulled out a flashlight and doubled back unaware that Konoko was waiting for him just around the corner. Kokono seized her chance, delivering a chop across the throat which sent the striker reeling back gasping for air. Giving him no time to recover she immediately followed up

with a uppercut that struck him straight under his chin flipping his head back and causing him to tumble to the floor like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

Konoko dragged the body back the way she had came behind the crate just encase someone heard the scuffle or came down this area at a later time. After a brief search of the strikers possessions Konoko found a shortwave radio already tuned into a local channel. Probably the frequency they were using to communicate. The rest of his belongings didn't interest her. Just some cigarettes, a sub machine pistol and the flashlight he used earlier. She pulled a pare of handcuffs off her belt and restrained the striker with his arms behind his back slotting the cuffs through a pipe running against the wall. He shouldn't be waking up anytime soon at any rate but better to be safe than sorry.

So the syndicate was to something, but the question was what? Well she was going to be the one to find out. She set off in the direction the striker had emerged from setting the radio to vibrate if any incoming calls were received. It would be a understatement to say that it would be a little inconvenient if the radio suddenly gave her position away in the middle of a syndicate facility. She could make out faint sounds ahead of her now which grew as she made her way up the dark passageway. Someone shouting though she couldn't make out the exact words out from this distance and the sound of machinery up ahead echoed down the walls.

Konoko reached the main loading area of the warehouse stepping onto a gantry overlooking it from below. It seemed as run down as the rest of the place with spider webbing scattered across the roof and the rusty handrail which didn't look like it would support much weight but the thing that immediately caught her attention was the large number of syndicate troops hauling crates into the back of 5 waiting trucks lined up in a row. She couldn't tell what the crates contained as they had no makings to indicate their contents but they were obviously important enough to warrant this level of protection.

One striker with a red uniform was motivating the workers loading the crates by shouting threats and reminding them that they were already behind schedule with the occasional prod from the watching strikers to keep their minds on the task at hand. Behind schedule? For what exactly? Konoko moved on, crossing the walkway while staying low to avoid detection. There were a series of doors on both sides of the corridor that she emerged from. Probably offices for the administrative side of the business.

She made her way down a steel staircase leading to what she believed to be the second floor. No one in sight and the lights were still out. The communicator that she relieved from the striker started to vibrate startling her for a moment before she realized what was causing it. She made sure she was alone before pulling it out of her leg pocket. She set the volume as low as it would go and placed the receiver right up against her ear. "This is central, report." stated someone, the commander no doubt. She than heard strikers reporting back their current status and position. This was bad. It wouldn't take them long to get to the 3rd floor and when whoever she took out failed to report back they would be put on alert.

Finally for what seemed like a eternity they got around to the 3rd floor. "3rd floor report" She waited with bated breath for the response.

"This is green 6, nothing to report." There was silence for a few fleeting seconds.

"Green 7 report immediately!" Again nothing.

"We may have some trouble here. I want all floors on high alertness and begin sweeping for possible hostiles." Just the news she didn't want to hear. Better report in and get some help down here fast.

She looked for a safe spot to make a call to headquarters eventually finding a office which after making sure it was unoccupied she quickly pulled out her radio. The office was dusty with large bookshelves devoid of any actual books and a rotten desk with a

large leather chair behind it. The most striking feature of the room was the large window overlooking the floor below. Probably so that whoever used to work here could keep an eye on the proceedings down below.

Konoko punched in a priority code so that her call would be the first one to make it through to Shinatama.

"Hello Shinatama? This is Konoko."

"Oh Konoko. I read you. I was starting to get worried. I hadn't heard from you in a while."

"This place, this warehouse is crawling with syndicate troops. I estimate between 15 to 20 combat personnel plus civilian workers loading large wooden crates into the back of trucks. I don't know what the crates contain. You better scramble a few SWAT teams and get them down here ASAP"

Shinatama's face was a mask of worry. Not only was Konoko in extreme danger but commander Griffin was sure to find out about this now. This was going to spell trouble for the both of them when he got wind of this. Oh Konoko, why do you always put yourself in so much danger?

"R..right Konoko. I'll get backup to you as soon as possible. Please try to stay out of sight until they arrive, they shouldn't take too long to reach you."

Well that was somewhat relieving. Still she had more immediate problems to deal with. "Well that's reassuring but they know someone's here. They're currently sweeping the building after one of their sentries failed to report in. I'm hiding out in one of the offices on the second floor."

Shinatama sighed. She wasn't entirely surprised. What part of stay out of danger didn't she understand? Danger is part of the job of course but she was always pushing herself too far. "And I suppose

that you were responsible for that? Didn't you say that you were just going to look around?"

Konoko didn't respond. For one thing she knew that her hunger for action sometimes caused problems for those around her but more importantly she could hear footsteps moving around outside.

Flashlight beams pierced the darkness, beaming through the window of the office door. They were searching for her and she was trapped in here with no way out apart from the way she had came.

She ducked behind the desk, sweat forming on her brow. Someone mumbled something and a few seconds later the beams left her casting the office in darkness once more. Seems she was safe for the time being but she didn't let her guard down. They could just easily double back. Konoko waited a few minutes to give her pursuers time to move away from her position. About 5 minutes had passed but they felt like hours as she waited their, alert for any possible sounds with the sinking feeling that they would come back. They didn't so Konoko left the office and took her chances outside.

What were her options? Stay here and fight, avoid any confrontations until back up arrived or get out of dodge. She decided that waiting for the SWAT teams would be the safest option plus she'd hate to miss out on the action when things kicked off.

Retracing her steps would be too risky as they were bound to focus their efforts around the area she dispatched the guard. Moving at a brisk pace but mindful of the importance of stealth she made her way down the metal steps searching for a vantage point from which she could await the cavalry. Somewhere near the ground floor so she could spring into action when the time came. The 1st floor or what she assumed to be the first floor was just as depressingly run down as the rest of the building. Some of the doors she passed where hanging off their hinges* and the view inside wasn't a welcome one with trash and furniture scattered around randomly. The corridors weren't exactly clear of obstacles either and she almost tripped over a bunch of bungled up papers laying on the ground, hidden from view in the all encompassing darkness. She cursed under her

breath. There was a flickering ceiling light ahead. Konoko was puzzled why it was the only one working so far on this floor. She almost didn't notice that she was being watched.

She looked up just in time to see a figure covered in shadows hanging from the ceiling. She could only see two dull red eyes watching her, most likely the glow given off by infrared. Perhaps sensing that he had been seen the figure leaped from the wall, hurling towards Konoko at insane speeds. Having little time to react and still surprised by the sudden attack Konoko barely managed to avoid the strike which had it hit would have broken her neck.

Twisting her body in a painful manner her attacker slashed her air just above her head and landed behind her. Avoiding the attack had hurt her and she winched as she turned to face her assailant.

She immediately recognized the mysterious attacker as a syndicate ninja having seen images of them during her briefings at headquarters. Ninjas were perhaps some of the deadliest syndicate troopers under Muro's command. Blindly fast and trained in a variety of techniques, enemies of the syndicate have learned to fear these silent assassins. Still the prospect of fighting one made the hairs on the back of her stand up with excitement. The ninja made the first move by making a series of lightning fast jabs with his fingers pressed firmly together. Konoko dodged the first few but was clipped on the shoulder, unable to keep up with his speed. The jab actually cut past her uniform and upon impact sent tendrils of pain racing across her left side. Damn it! It must have been some kind of attack against her nervous system. The ninja pressed his advantage pushing Konoko back against the wall all the while Konoko was having difficulty fending off his attacks with only one arm functioning properly. She considered drawing her side arm but doubted she'd have the chance to use it. Konoko's back suddenly hit the wall. Crap out of room! Having seen this the ninja sprang like a coiled spring and aimed a kick at her head which she barely managed to avoid. The kick smashed into the wall sending plaster flying. She didn't just avoid the hit though, taking advantage of her opponents miss she aimed a kick at the ninjas kneecap. She heard a stomach-turning

crack and watched as the ninja collapsed howling in pain. Thankfully her arm had recovered by that time and she swiftly snapped her adversary's neck.

Konoko felt exhilarated even while she crouched there catching her breath. She just defeated one of the best fighters the syndicate had to offer. Still it hadn't been easy and could have easily ended differently. A sobering thought indeed plus she was still smack in the middle of enemy territory. She set off again through the twisting corridors. Where was the staircase to get down to ground level? With no sense of direction she could be roaming around up here when the SWAT team arrived. The syndicate radio was transmitting again so she pulled the vibrating device out of her pocket, hit the receive button and held it up to her ear. "Unit 4 reporting in. We've found our ninja. His neck has been snapped."

Another voice replied back soon after. Probably the commander. "Damn it. Obviously someone from the TCTF is running around up there somewhere. Unit 4 proceed with your sweep. Units 5,6 and 7 cut off the 1st floor and sweep the office block. We'll trap whoever's up there between us and kill them. Be on guard! We still don't know how many people we're dealing with. Red out!"

It had only been a few minutes since her engagement with the ninja. They must be right on her tail. It could be possible to escape the net if she was fast enough. If not she would be trapped between the two groups of strikers. Better to engage or avoid one group and get down to the first floor. Sprinting away from the direction of the strikers coming up behind her she ran with everything she had throwing caution to the wind in her efforts to escape the net forming around her. She rounded a corner and saw two strikers coming out of the murk. One of them raised his torch and with a panicked look on his face shouted "It's him! Shoot! Shoot!". Clearly they were as surprised as she was. Konoko didn't slow down one bit and executed a flying kick as soon as she was close enough that smashed one of the strikers square in the face, shattering his faceplate. As his comrade collapsed to the ground the other striker raised his SMG and hosed

the area with deadly bullets however Konoko wasn't in his sights anymore as she had seen that he was armed and had immediately sidestepped to avoid any incoming fire. She delivered a swift uppercut which struck her opponent under the chin and followed up with her other fist, driving it into the side of his head with enough force to pulverize his helmet. Unsurprisingly after that he slipped out of consciousness and dropped to the floor like a dead wight. She heard someone round the corner behind her and found herself facing the barrel of a plasma rifle. He raised the weapon to bear.

The striker was too far away to rush. She had to do something within the next second or face the hail of super host plasma which would stand a good chance of ripping through her armor and searing her flesh to the bone. Looking around in blind panic she spotted a door on her left and without thinking dived towards it ripping the door off its hinges with a shoulder barge, sending wooden splinters flying in all directions. The room was a office much like the one she had hidden in earlier. She could hear more and more voices outside, gathering in the passageway. "She went in that room over there!" or "Where did he go?". Still assuming she was a guy? There were plenty of female agents nowadays. She estimated from the number of voices that there was between 5 to 8 people out there. It was only a matter of time before they figured out she was alone and rushed her. Footsteps echoed from outside the door frame so she stuck her gun out the corner and squeezed off a few rounds blindly and was rewarded with a shriek of pain.

A storm of plasma fire answered her, striking the remains of the door causing it to disintegrate in a flash of fireworks. Konoko backed away, not wanting to get caught by any stray shots. They must have another rifle out there. Needing a escape plan she looked around noticing that the only exit was the now smoldering door. There was a large glass window like in the last office although this one was overlooking the loading area below where the syndicate was still busy loading their mysterious cargo. While the thought didn't appeal to her much she could jump out of the window onto one of the trucks below. Some objects hitting the ground brought her attention back to

the doorway where the sound had originated from. Konoko had the unwelcome sight of several grenades rolling towards her along the floor. There was nothing in the room that would shield her from the full effects of the blast and the grenades owners would no doubt be following closely behind in the wake of the explosion. Her choice made for her, Konoko fired a few well placed shots into the glass and executing a running jump, she leaped through the window, shattering it into a million pieces. A second later the room she had been in only a moment ago turned into a roaring inferno. She could feel the heat and the force of the blast as she tried to steady her decent. Landing roughly on top of her chosen landing spot, one of the middle trucks, she doubled over and fell flat. "What the hell was that?" came a voice from below. "Hey theres someone on top of the truck.".

Konoko just wanted to lay there for a minute and catch her breath but it looks like they weren't going to let her. Figures...

She shuffled over so she could stick her head out to see what was under her but instead locked eyes with a striker. "Hey I see someone, its that agent!" he yelled. Konoko pulled her head back and cursed under her breath. Well since scanning her surroundings before deciding on a course of action was now completely out of the window she better make a swift exit. Pulling out a handgun clip from her belt, she threw it in the opposite direction that she intended to go in the hopes of drawing attention away from the doors just to the north of her position. Konoko waited until she heard the clip impact behind her before she stood upright. There were two strikers standing in between her and the door. She could see them lock eyes with her as she started running, building speed up to close the gap between them in a instant. They raised their weapons. Too late! Hurtling through the air towards them and with expect timing she span her body around in midair like a windmill and delivered a simultaneous kick to each of them, knocking their heads back with such force that they were flung from their feet. Konoko hit the ground and didn't miss a step, pumping her arms for more speed she reached the door before anyone else could draw a bead on her.

On the other side of the door was another expanse of dank corridors combined with empty offices, store rooms with their contents scattered across the floor and some rooms that didn't seem to have a purpose. At least the lighting was better here and Konoko didn't have to risk stumbling over something with every step she took. She heard moment behind her and saw several shapes moving on the other side of the door leading from the loading area. She sent a few rounds through the door to keep away any annoying attention which was quickly answered by their own gunfire. Konoko needed a distraction, something to keep the syndicate busy for a few minutes. She hauled a moldy mattress off a bed from one of the disused offices, coughing from the smell and dumped it in the middle of the corridor. She had to take some care in doing this while avoiding the random gunfire. Taking shelter in a neighboring room she pulled out her lighter and set the mattress alight. That should hopefully buy her enough time until the SWAT team finally made it here. Now was as good a time as any to check in with Shinatama but first Konoko made her way deeper into the office complex just in case they made it past the flaming obstacle she had set up.

"Shinatama, this is Konoko reporting in."

Back at headquarters Shinatama was so relieved to hear from Konoko again. It had been so long since their last conversation that she had began to fear the worst. Konoko could clearly hear the worry in her voice.

"Konoko, what happened to you? Your last communication was so long ago now and I... was starting to think that something had happened to you.".

"Don't worry about me, you know just how tough I am. Nothing can keep me down. Do you know how long the SWAT team will be? I've had to fend off more than my fair share of attention."

"Don't worry about me, you know just how tough I am. Nothing can keep me down. Can you tell me how long the SWAT team will be?"

I've had to fend off more than my fair share of attention and could use some help."

Shinatama glanced at the computer screen in front of her, the monitor casting her in a ghostly glow.

"They'll be with you very soon now. Another few minutes, maybe less."

Well that was some good news. Konoko was about to tell Shinatama as much when she heard two thumps emanating from the hallway. She cut off the feed from headquarters, not wanting to be distracted. With her gun in hand she peered out into the corridor which was now alive with flames crackling in the distance. She could clearly make out two figures busy brushing patches of fire off their heavily armored suits. Konoko recognized them immediately as elite strikers. Their immense forms wouldn't have much trouble wading through a wall of fire as long as they didn't linger for too long. They both spotted her staring at them and glared back at her with bright red eyes.

They almost looked like demons with the burning inferno roaring behind them. Konoko trained her pistol on them and stepped into the open since they were at first glance unarmed. "Hands on your head, you're under arrest." she said firmly. They started laughing at her with a deep voice distorted by the all encompassing helmets they wore then started running at her. Well she didn't expect them to give up without a fight but shooting them outright wasn't something a agent should do when it could be avoided and the SWAT team should be with her shortly. She pulled the trigger and emptied the whole clip into the charging enemy's. The bullets simply bounced off their thick suits and they barely slowed down in the face of her gunfire. That must be why they were so cocky before. They weren't slowing down as they rushed towards her so Konoko dodged their lunge at the last moment by jumping back into the room where she had made her call to Shinatama before she was so rudely interrupted. Fighting them in the narrow confines of the corridor would be a foolish move while on the other hand a wide open space

such as this would allow her to exploit her advantage in speed. It didn't take them long to thunder into the room after her but that gave her the time to reload her pistol. They stopped short of were she was standing and moved to either side of her in a attempt to surround her.

Well they had some fighting sense at least. The opponent on her left was the first to make his move, he lashed out at her but only struck air as Konoko moved only a few steps to the side, anticipating the attack perfectly. She had to duck the blow of the other elite striker which followed in the wake of her first attacker hoping to catch her off guard. She replied by smashing her fist into the side of his head and, pivoting on the balls of her feet she kicked out at the striker behind her who was taken by surprise by her ability to attack both of them at the same time. Her kick landed squarely in the center of his chest with enough force to drive him back a few steps. She followed this up by firing a few shots into his kneecap which forced him to his knees. The bullets wouldn't penetrate but that didn't matter as long as it gave her a opening. Unfortunately for her the headshot that she had dished out to her first adversary hadn't stunned him for as long as she had anticipated. She just noticed the shadow looming over her before it was too late to do anything about it.

She formed her arms together in a cross arm guard in a split second just as the blow connected. The heavy strike still sent a jolt through her down to the bones, knocking the pistol from her hand and lifting her off her feet, landing her in a pile of decomposing cardboard boxes. Konoko took a few precious seconds to regain her bearings, in which time her enemy had closed the gap between them and was readying himself to attack again. The fog lifted from her eyes as she lay on her back just in time to see a metal boot descending towards her like a guillotine. Rolling to the side, she avoided the lethal death blow by a hairs breath. While still on the ground Konoko used the momentum to swing her body around and sweep the legs out from under the elite. He buckled over and slammed into the floor, cracking the concrete and sending clouds of dust into the air. Konoko couldn't press her advantage as the second elite striker was stalking towards

her, with menace in his voice he roared that he was going to rip her head off with his bear hands. He charged towards her, throwing punch after punch while Konoko dodged and weaved, avoiding the heavy swings with the grace of a trained martial artist.

The elite was getting frustrated at his inability to land a hit and was becoming more reckless with each swing while Konoko remained calm, waiting for an opening. She twisted to the side as an uppercut zoomed past her and landed one of her own. The elite staggered back a few paces, spitting out a few broken teeth which rattled about in his helmet. When he regained his composure he automatically raised his arms in a defensive posture but the TCTF agent wasn't standing in front of him any more. It took him a second to realize that Konoko had jumped towards him as he scanned around. Konoko placed both her hands on the elite's head and held on until her body was completely vertical with the elite under her. It took quite a bit of control to line herself up like that. When she was in position she span her entire body round while still maintaining her tight grip on the elite's head. The result was that the elite's neck was snapped as his head was twisted around at an unnatural angle. Konoko heard the sickening sound of breaking bones as she released her now dead adversary who's now limp body promptly collapsed onto the ground. That's one down, fighting one on one will make things a lot easier. The last elite saw what fate had befallen his comrade and scrambled away from Konoko. Wait a minute, he wasn't running away from her. He was going after her fallen pistol!

Konoko started running after him but realized that she wouldn't make it to her weapon before he did. Along the way she stanced a toppled chair off the floor, broke off a leg and threw it towards the syndicate elite. Having picked up her pistol he turned, ready to blast Konoko at range rather than try his luck at close combat where his friend had met his untimely end. He managed to fire off a few rounds before the chair leg hit him, impacting on Konoko's chest plate, sending feelings of pain coursing throughout her body. Bullets of that caliber normally wouldn't penetrate the amour used by TCTF agents but it would certainly leave a few bruises in the morning. Konoko was

aiming for his head with the wooden leg but instead it hit him in the shoulder. Well it still had the desired effect of throwing his aim off for a precious few moments. Konoko reached him and aimed a punch at the elbow joint of his outstretched arm, causing him to drop the handgun. he howled in pain as the gun clattered to the floor, sending echoes bouncing around the room.

Konoko's communicator was vibrating but she ignored it for the time being as she ducked under a swing that zoomed past her and then deflected another attempt by pushing the approaching fist away with her arms. "What the hell are you?!" the elite grunted as he continued in vain to attack her. Konoko's reply was silent but altogether more direct. First she drove the elite back by landing a snap kick squarely on his abdomen, then sidestepping his clumsy return swing she drove the palm of her hand up, directly into his throat. He reeled back, choking with one arm around his neck. Konoko finished him with a quick two punch combo followed up with an uppercut that knocked his lights out. With the immediate threat past her the adrenaline started to wear off and her body started reminding her now tired and beat up she was. She slumped against the nearest wall and took a few minutes of well deserved rest, trying to ignore the vibrating sign on her belt that meant someone wanted to talk to her. After a few blissful moments of peace she reluctantly unhooked her communicator.

"Konoko! What happened! "I've been trying to..." Konoko had to pull the radio from her ear for a moment as Shinatama was speaking far too loud and her head still ached a little.

"Shinatama, please speak more softly. I've got a headache."

"O..okay Konoko."

"I had to cut the call short last time thanks to some unwanted attention from a pair of elite strikers. One of them is still alive but out cold. I'll need someone to pick him up when the SWAT team eventually gets here." If they ever get here Konoko thought to herself."

Shinatama was impressed and a little worried at Konoko's prowess. She was being put under a abnormal amount of stress and danger. Maybe that was pushing her to....

"Shinatama?"

Konoko snapped her out of her musing.

"Right... the Swat team should arrive any minute now."

Almost as if on cue Konoko heard a loud crash that reverberated throughout the building, shaking the very ground she stood on.

"What was that?"

"That was the SWAT team Konoko. The captain informed me that he would be ramming the main shutter of the loading bay, cutting off their escape route by blocking the only way out with the armored transport."

Konoko smiled to herself. Whoever the captain was certainly knew how to make a entrance.

"Right Shinatama, I'd better get moving and give them a hand."

"Wait Konoko! You're hurt and exhausted. Just rest there for a while. The SWAT team can handle things by themselves." But Konoko was already dead set on helping out, all feelings of fatigue forgotten at the prospect of being left out. After all, she was the one who had put the most work into this bust and she sure as hell wasn't going to be left out. If any credit was due, it was due in her direction.

"Don't worry so much Shinamata. This is me you're talking too. I feel better already!" And with that Konoko raced off towards the loading bay. She had to take a roundabout way thanks to the still burning mattress. She slowed down to a jog as she heard gunfire ahead. Plasma rifles busts and sub machine guns could be heard exchanging fire. She moved up to the entrance of the loading bay,

not bothering to cover her footsteps as there was plenty of noise to mask her movements. She peered out. The SWAT van had knocked the main hanger doors open and disgorged its cargo of TCTF SWAT troopers upon the unsuspecting syndicate troops. She could make out their dull gray armor and bright striped shoulder guards. A number of strikers had tossed wooden boxes onto the floor and other make shift barricades to act as cover and were exchanging fire with the attacking agents who in turn were moving up in well drilled fire teams, taking it in turns to move up and then fall into a covering position. She could already see a number of strikers lying lifelessly on the floor, bullet wounds and burn marks from plasma weaponry riddled all over them. The noise of projectiles was almost deafening as the gunfight grew in intensity. Just then one of the SWAT agents helmets was thrown back violently. His body spasmed for a few seconds before slumping against one of the trucks he was using for cover. Even from this distance she could make out a single hole in his visor. One of the agents called out "Sniper!"

That made sense. She had noticed a trail of silver out of the corner of her eye before the SWAT member had been shot. This combined with the single head shot suggested a sniper wielding a mercury bow. A particularly nasty weapon that fired bolts of mercury that would poison anyone it didn't kill outright. A favored weapon of snipers. But where did the shit come from? Shots were starting to rain down from the upper levels as the strikers stationed up there realized what was going on. The SWAT troopers were having to take cover as their enemy started taking pot shots over from the high ground. A crate was torn apart as plasma fire ripped into it, forcing the agent sheltering behind it to drive behind a nearby barrel. Another agent wasn't so lucky when a stray plasma blot struck his chest, melting thought his armor and causing him to scream in agony. Konoko, while trying to shut out the dying agents cries decided that heading to the second floor would be a more effective use of her talents than joining in the assault on the loading bay. Eliminating the enemy overlooking the loading bay would allow the agents to mop up the remaining defenders in short order. Remembering that she had passed a staircase on her journey to

help her colleagues she quickly backtracked to it, racing up them two steps at a time. She paused as she reached the top, peering through the window set into the top of the metal door. It looked clear and the sounds of battle sounded distant. Opening the door and with expert care she sneaked her way onwards, trying to pinpoint the enemy's firing positions. as she went while taking care to avoid any surprises along the way. The echoes of gunfire were becoming ever louder as they reverberated down the winding passageways.

She stopped dead as muzzle flashes lit up the darkness ahead of her indicating that whoever the weapons belonged too would be only a few footsteps away. She pulled out her trusty mirror to see round the corner without revealing herself. She steadied her arm, trying not to flinch everytime they pulled the trigger which wasn't easy when they were only a hairs breath away. She made out 3 shooters, all armed with plasma rifles. She decided not to use her pistol as they outgunned her and instead sprinted towards the nearest striker, confident that they wouldn't notice what was happening until she was right on top of them. Her target turned his head towards her and only had time to register a look of fearful surprise before Konoko grabbed both of his legs from behind and hoisted him out of the window he was firing from. His cries for help were cut off abruptly as he impacted onto the concrete floor below. This however did alert his two former colleagues to her presence. Not soon enough though as Konoko already had her pistol drawn and was running towards target number two, firing as she went. Round after round hit the striker, some rounds bouncing off his armor with a audible ping but many more were penetrating at such close range, causing horrible internal injuries as the bullets ricocheted around inside his body. Konoko reached him and proceeded to relieve the plasma rifle from his grasp as she didn't have time to reload the pistol and still had another striker to deal with. She let her pistol clatter to the ground as she grabbed the rifle, aiming the weapon towards target number 3. Being the furthest away gave the striker more time to react than his hapless friends and Konoko found herself with the unwelcome sight of a plasma barrel leveled right at her. With little time to think she caught the 2nd henchman before he fell and pushed him forward.

His now lifeless body stumbled forwards, blocking Konoko from view. "Damn it, get the hell out of my way!" he said, shooting on full auto the surrounding area was peppered with red hot plasma including the now unrecognizable form of the striker. Konoko rolled to the side escaping the onslaught, raised her weapon and sent her own ball of plasma racing through the air. The shot struck her opponent square in the face, melting through his helmet with the force of a blast furnace. Only his blacken skull remained in the aftermath.

Konoko once again found herself standing alone. With that threat removed the SWAT team should have a much easier time on the factory floor without getting pinned down by plasma fire. There was a row of windows set into the wall overlooking the ground floor which afforded a nice view of the battle below. The TCTF agents had cut down the majority of the opposition by this point, no doubt aided in this endeavor in no small part by Konoko's initiative. Getting assigned a more prominent position in the TCTF should be right around the corner after they read the reports of how useful she had been in cracking this syndicate facility. That was of course after Shinatama had helped smoothed things over at headquarters. Specifically the part about leaving her assigned area and getting into trouble, but hey, they couldn't argue with results. Something caught her eye, a red light beaming across from the other side of the factory complex. The red beam was moving across the factory in her direction, realizing what it was Konoko jerked her head back a instant before the beam reached her. A high pitched whine filled her ears as the mercury bolt cut through the air just above her. Konoko slid a hand under her to steady herself and pressed her back against the wall just below the window. The shot had come from the other side of the factory, over the expanse of the loading area, that she was sure of. She looked up at the wall opposite her, taking notice of the impact mark the blot had left. Mercury was dripping down the wall now that the field of the blot had dissipated. She raised her gaze to the neat hole in the glass of the window above her. Putting these two angles together gave her a rough idea of where the sniper may be but if he was any good, he would have moved position since his last shot to put off any attempts to locate him. She needed to be sure

before she stuck her neck out to take a shot. Konoko decided that she needed a little help.

Opening the tactical frequency on her radio she attempted to contact the captain in charge of the SWAT team. Nothing but the hissing of static could be heard for a few seconds before her radio tuned in to their frequency. Suddenly the radio came to life with the many agents reporting their progress, ammunition levels or just shouting at the enemy.

"This is TCTF agent Konoko. Requesting to speak to the captain of the SWAT team." She didn't have to wait long for a response. A carefree sounding voice greeted her.

"Hey Konoko. We were told you might be around here having all the fun to yourself. My names captain Chris Hannson of SWAT team sword. Switch to frequency 23 and we can talk without all the background noise."

"Right I've switched to 23. I'm currently on the second floor overlooking the factory floor. I've dealt with those annoying plasma gunners for you but.."

"Yeah thanks for that, was a real help down here believe me" He interrupted. Konoko continued on without acknowledging him.

"But theres a sniper up here and he has me in his sights. Hes hold up somewhere on the neighboring side of the factory, opposite me judging from the trajectory. I'm going to give him a target to shoot at. Can you monitor that side of the office block for me?"

"I certainly can. Hope you're not planning on using yourself as a target. That won't end well for ya."

Trust her to get someone with a bad sense of humor. Fighting down her urge to verbally slap him round the head she continued on.

"Don't you worry, I have a plan. If you could just watch for him when he makes his move and then keep his head down for a little while that would be great."

After enduring more of his unique banter Konoko cut the line. She gave him a few seconds to get ready and then set about gathering her prop. She removed one of the strikers helmets which would act as the bait to lure the sniper to reveal his position. The good captain would assist her by spotting his location and keeping his head down for a few seconds. She lifted the helmet slowly using the rifle head of one of the fallen plasma weapons. No sooner had it risen above the protective concrete wall a ray of silver cut a hole clear through the forehead, knocking it off the rifle where it span on the floor before coming to a halt. She heard the concussive force of pistol rounds and smashed glass in the background and waited impatiently. She didn't have to wait long.

"Hey Konoko. I'm spraying the area with bullets, keeping his head down. His location is the office window just above the large yellow forklift. Hes all yours!"

Now she had all the information she needed to take this guy out.

"Thanks for the assistance, captain."

She eased herself into a firing position with the nagging feeling that she was about to be sniped as soon as she was stupid enough to stick her head out. Thankfully that wasn't the case as she trained her plasma rifle on the area indicated. This was the most risky part to undertake. She had to scan the surrounding landscape for movement which would give away the snipers position. She had to shoot him in that small window before he realized that he was now the one being hunted. A second hesitation could prove fatal. She slowed her breathing and steadied her aim. By this time the captain had ceased his covering fire and had returned to command the battle below which seemed to be on its last legs. The sounds of battle were becoming more and more sporadic. She closed her mind off to all outside interferences, totally focused on that one important shot.

Detecting movement on a fire escape and seeing a slight flash of reflective glass she ever so slowly moved her rifle into position. Looking through the scope mounted on top of the weapon she strained to make out a shadowy figure in a prone position holding the unmistakable shape of a long rifle. No doubt a mercury bow. The fire escape was a good position which was far on the right hand side of the loading bay, leading down from the second floor office block and providing a nice range of view. The sniper seemed to be dressed in a black bodysuit which perfectly matched his surroundings. Had she not known he was already there, no one would be any the wiser that they were in his sights. The optics on his weapon would be far superior to her own so she had to make the first shot count. Konoko took a deep breath, and then exhaled. She pulled the trigger. It only took a second for the plasma round to reach across the vast expanse to the other side but it felt like minutes for Konoko as she tracked the shot through the gloom. There was a flash of sparks as the round struck metal, briefly illuminating the surrounding area. Her blood turned to ice as she realized that her aim had been just a fraction off and had bored a hole into the steel staircase above the snipers head who was even now aiming his weapon at the source of this attack. Konoko dropped to the ground and dived to the side immediately. She heard the intense shrill of the high powered round overhead indicating that she had escaped death by the barest of margins. She sprung up at the neighboring window, smashed the glass with the rifle butt and took aim. Only giving herself a second to aim she pressed down on the trigger. She could see the sniper leveling his weapon towards her even as the bolt hurtled towards him. This time she was more lucky and the round struck true. Konoko slumped to the floor with a look of pure relief. More good news was to follow as the captain informed her that the battle was over.

Down in the loading bay Konoko was seated on one of the wooden crates being attended to by a medic. He was busy tending to the many scrapes and bruises she had suffered. Still it could have been far worse. She allowed herself to finally relax and let the sense of accomplishment wash over her. She hadn't been this satisfied since

her victorious dual with that large elite at the gates of the bio plant. She took in the activity happening all around her. SWAT officers were rounding up the remaining syndicate troopers and workers up against a wall with their hands placed above their heads. A pair of agents had them covered in case they made any foolish moves. She noticed someone moving towards her out of the corner of her eye.

"Hey Konoko, it's me. Captain Hannson at your service."

He had removed his helmet by this point. He was a fairly young looking man considering he held the rank of captain.

"It seems that these crates all contain weapons. Plasma rifles, grenade launchers, you name it! They even have a few crates worth of demolition charges. What they were planning on doing with all this hardware is anyone's guess though I'm just glad no one set this stuff off during the firefight. Would have made an impressive fireworks display!"

"Have any of the captives talked yet?"

Hannson placed a hand under his chin.

"No not yet, though we haven't had much time with them yet. Just you wait until we get back to headquarters. They'll be talking in no time!"

Well at least he was confident. As for herself, she would be content with some much deserved rest.